

Through the Years

Over time the way we think about transportation in Indiana has changed. From dirt roads to a complex web of paved interstates, we have come a long way, and we have changed as the world around us changed. Here is a brief glimpse at how things started as well as some significant milestones in the history of transportation.

Indiana's "highway network" started out as a series of dirt paths, which settlers created for local travel. Most of the time, these paths did not interconnect, making travel difficult at best.

When automobiles came on the scene in the late 1800s and early 1900s, people wanted better roads to travel. This interest was a national one, sparking the U.S. Congress to offer money to any state that would improve its roads. Indiana took Congress up on its offer and created the Indiana State Highway

Commission (ISHC) in 1919. This Commission's task was to create a highway network that would connect every county seat and every town with a population over 5,000.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 established what is known today as the Interstate Highway System and signaled the beginning of the largest public works project in U.S. history. The act also established the Federal Highway Trust Fund, marking the first time that tax income from motor vehicles and highway expenditures were linked at the national level. The intent of the legislation was to make the highway program self-financing through the imposition of user fees.

A national highway safety program was initiated with the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1966. The program established safety standards for motor vehicles and authorized matching grants to carry out safety activities.

The State Highway Commission served Hoosiers well until 1981 when it became the Indiana Department of Highways (IDOH). The Indiana Department of Highways also included the Office of Traffic Safety, the Toll Road Commission and the Toll Bridge Commission.

On July 1, 1989 the Department of Highways underwent another change, combining the Department of Highways and the Transportation Planning Office to become the agency as we know it today—the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT).

In 1997, Governor Frank O'Bannon and the Indiana General Assembly started the Crossroads 2000 Program. This program invested \$813 million in new highway construction projects across Indiana.

This year in history

- 1892—Roads are made of dirt
- 1862—Transcontinental railroad
- 1903—Orville Wright flies at Kitty Hawk
- 1908—Henry Ford produces Model T
- 1914—AASHO (AASHTO) forms
- 1926—National Road named U.S. 40
- 1952—S.R. 420 (I-80/94) is built
- 1956—Federal Highway Act
- 1976—I-65 and I-70 complete
- 1989—IDOH becomes INDOT
- 1997—Crossroads 2000 Program
- 1998—TEA-21 new federal funding



Driving in the country was a lot different back then (top), Old U.S. 40 (middle) A road crew from yesteryear (bottom).